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Review of *Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums* by Ruth B. Phillips

Lee-Ann Martin

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BOOK REVIEWS

Museum Pieces: Toward the Indigenization of Canadian Museums. By Ruth B. Phillips. Montreal, QC: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011. xvi + 376 pp. Photographs, illustrations, notes, index. \$110.00 cloth, \$39.95 paper.

The recent history of museums and Indigenous peoples has developed along diverging lines in Canada and the United States. In Canada, the controversy around *The Spirit Sings: Artistic Traditions of Canada's First Peoples*, an exhibition organized for the 1988 Olympics in Calgary, Alberta, provided the impetus for the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples which, in turn, sparked subsequent debates surrounding museological policies and practices over the past twenty years. Ruth Phillips locates this exhibition as the point of departure for the "post-colonial project" that has informed subsequent museum reform in Canada.

Thoroughly articulated with characteristic rigor, Phillips's collected readings will provide a wealth of information and analysis for scholars and students. The book is divided into four sections, each representing aspects of the history of "contestation, innovation and change" defining the relationships between museums and Indigenous communities since 1967.

Phillips provides a comparison of two national museums in Canada and the United States developed during the "period of heightened Native North American cultural activism of the late 1980s and early 1990s." She locates her discussion of the unique approaches developed for The First Peoples Hall at the Canadian Museum of Civilization, completed in 2003, and the National Museum of the American Indian, opened in 2004, in the divergent political contexts and activist movements in each country. She devotes a substantial portion of the book to exhibitions of Indigenous art and the "dialogues between art history and anthropology." Yet, paradoxically,

she overlooks the critical role played by contemporary Indigenous art and the significant contributions of Indigenous art scholars and curators in advancing the discourse around inclusion and representation in museums over the past two decades at least.

As her collection of essays attests, Phillips has played a significant role in the discourse surrounding museums' policies and practices related to Indigenous people. However, for her, "Indigenization" is rather a notion of hybridization derived from historical relationships of compromise and reciprocity between the originating nations and the early European colonists. She supports the suggestion of a "characteristically (egalitarian) Canadian model" of partnership proposed by philosopher John Ralston Saul in *A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada* (2008). For many in the Indigenous art community, this proposed theoretical framework reveals a language of entitlement and academic privilege. From the perspective of this Indigenous museum professional, the idea of "hybridization as an egalitarian model" is consistent with a Canadian imaginary built upon a historical fiction of a mutually beneficial relationship that erases centuries of colonial oppression.

For many Indigenous scholars and curators, the project of Indigenization is clearly not about the hybridization of museums. It is rather about the reformation, reinvention, and rejection of Western models to suit our own purposes. Indigenous perspectives on "contestation, innovation and change" require equal space on the long road to decolonization and Indigenization.

LEE-ANN MARTIN
Curator of Contemporary
Canadian Aboriginal Art
Canadian Museum of Civilization
Gatineau, Quebec